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Notes on Carl Schmitt's

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By Leo Strauss

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I

[1] The treatise by Schmitt¹ serves the question of the “order of the human things” (96; 95), that is, the question of the state. In view of the fact that in the present age the state has become more questionable than it has been for centuries or more (22f.; 23 f.), understanding the state requires a radical foundation, “a simple and elementary presentation” of what the basis of the state is, which means the basis of the political; for “the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political” (19; 20).

[2] This thesis, with which the investigation of the concept of the political is begun, must be understood in accordance with Schmitt’s own general principles of understanding. Following these principles, the sentence “the political precedes the state” can manifest the desire to express not an eternal truth but only a present truth. For “all spirit [is] only spirit of the present” (80; 79); “all concepts of the spiritual sphere, including the concept of spirit, are in themselves pluralistic and are to be understood only in terms of their concrete political existence” (85; 84); “all political concepts, ideas, and words [have] a polemical meaning; they have a concrete opposition in view, they are tied to a concrete situation . . .” (30; 31). In accordance with these principles, it must be asked: To what extent does the present situation compel us to recognize that the basis of the state is the political? Against what opponent does the political emerge as the basis of the state?

[3] The present situation is characterized by the fact that a process three hundred years old has “reached its end” (94; 94). The age at the end of which we find ourselves is “the age of neutralizations and depoliticizations.” Depoliticization not only is the accidental or even necessary result of the modern development

¹*Der Begriff des Politischen. Mit einer Rede über das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen und Entpolitisierungen neu herausgegeben von Carl Schmitt* (Munich and Leipzig, 1932). These parenthetical page numbers originally referred to the 1932 text. For the convenience of the modern reader, the italicized page numbers refer to this edition of *The Concept of the Political*, while the page numbers in roman refer to the 1963 edition.

but is its original and authentic goal; the movement in which the modern spirit has gained its greatest efficacy, liberalism, is characterized precisely by the *negation* of the political (67ff.; 68 ff.). If liberalism has already become implausible, if it accordingly must be countered by “another system,” then the first word against liberalism must in any case be: the *position* of the political. And if liberalism believed that by means of its negation of the political it could bring about the foundation of the state or, more accurately, the establishment of rational social relations, after the failure of liberalism one cannot help thinking that the state can be understood only from the position of the political. Thus Schmitt’s basic thesis is entirely dependent upon the polemic against liberalism; it is to be understood only qua polemical, only “in terms of concrete political existence.”

[4] Schmitt’s task is determined by the fact that liberalism has failed. The circumstances of this failure are as follows: Liberalism negated the political; yet liberalism has not thereby eliminated the political from the face of the earth but only has hidden it; liberalism has led to politics’ being engaged in by means of an antipolitical mode of discourse. Liberalism has thus killed not the political but only understanding of the political, sincerity regarding the political (64ff.; 65 ff.). In order to remove the smokescreen over reality that liberalism produces, the political must be made apparent as such and as simply undeniable. The political must first be brought out of the concealment into which liberalism has cast it, so that the question of the state can be seriously put.

[5] It is thus insufficient to establish as a fact that liberalism has failed, to show how liberalism drives itself ad absurdum in every political action, to indicate “that all good observers . . . despaired of finding here [in liberalism] any political principle or intellectual consistency” (70; 69). Nor does it suffice to attain the insight that the manifest inconsistency of all liberal politics is the necessary consequence of the fundamental negation of the political (70; 69). What is needed rather is to replace the “astonishingly consistent systematics of liberal *thought*,” which is manifest within the inconsistency of liberal *politics*, by “another system” (71; 70),

namely, a system that does not negate the political but brings it into recognition.

[6] Schmitt is aware that the “astonishingly consistent . . . systematics of liberal thought” has, “despite all setbacks, still not been replaced in Europe today by any other system” (71; 70), and this awareness alone suffices to characterize the significance of his efforts; for with this awareness he stands wholly alone among the opponents of liberalism, who usually carry an elaborate unliberal doctrine in their pocket. In making this observation Schmitt points to the basic difficulty of his own investigation also. For if it is true that the “systematics of liberal thought” has “still not been replaced in Europe today by any other system,” it is to be expected that he, too, will be compelled to make use of elements of liberal thought in the presentation of his views. The tentativeness of Schmitt’s statements results from that compulsion. Schmitt himself explicitly says so: he wants to do no more than “‘to delimit’ theoretically an immense problem”; the theses of his text “are conceived as a *point of departure* for an objective discussion” (96). The foregoing engenders the critic’s duty to pay more attention to what distinguishes Schmitt from the prevailing view than to the respects in which he merely follows the prevailing view.

II

[7] Schmitt expressly desists from providing an “exhaustive definition” of the political (26; 26). From the outset he understands the question of the *essence* of the political” (19; 20) as the question of *what is specific* to the political (20; 21 and 25f.; 26 f.). He does so, to be sure, not because he regards the question of the genus (within which the specific difference of the political has to be stipulated) as already answered or even as immaterial, but precisely because of his deep suspicion of what is today the most obvious answer: he pioneers a path to an original answer to the genus question by using the phenomenon of the political to push the most obvious answer ad absurdum. What is still today, despite all challenges, the most obvious, genuinely liberal answer to the

question of the genus within which the peculiarity of the political and, therewith, of the state is to be defined is that genus is the “*culture*,” that is, the totality of “human thought and action,” which is divided into “various, relatively independent domains” (25; 26), into “provinces of culture” (Natorp). Schmitt would remain within the horizon of this answer if, as at first appears, he were to say: just as “in the domain of the moral the ultimate distinctions are good and evil, in the aesthetic domain beautiful and ugly, in the economic domain useful and harmful,” so the “specifically political distinction . . . is the distinction between friend and enemy” (26; 26). However, this ordering of the political next to, and equivalent to, the other “provinces of culture” is expressly rejected: the distinction between friend and enemy is “*not equivalent and analogous* . . . to those other distinctions”; the political does *not* describe “a new *domain* of its own” (26; 27). What is hereby said is that the understanding of the political implies a fundamental critique of at least the prevailing concept of culture.

[8] Schmitt does not express this critique everywhere. He too, using the terminology of a whole literature, occasionally speaks of the “various, relatively independent domains of human thought and action” (25; 26) or of the various “spheres of human life and thought” (66; 66). In one passage (72; 71) he expresses himself in such a way that a superficial reader could get the following impression: after liberalism has brought the autonomy of the aesthetic, of morals, of science, of the economy, etc. into recognition, Schmitt now seeks, for his part, to bring the autonomy of the political into recognition, in opposition to liberalism but nonetheless in continuation of liberal aspirations for autonomy. To be sure, the quotation marks that he places around the word “autonomy” in the expression “autonomy of the various domains of human life” already show how little the foregoing is Schmitt’s opinion. This [indication] becomes clearer when he emphasizes the “*matter-of-factness*” with which liberalism “not only recognizes the ‘autonomy’ of the various domains of human life but exaggerates it to the point of specialization and even to complete isolation” (72; 71). Schmitt’s aloofness from the prevailing concept of culture be-

comes fully clear in the following indirect characterization of the aesthetic: “the path from the metaphysical and the moral to the economic traverses the aesthetic, and the path across aesthetic consumption and enjoyment, be they ever so sublime, is the surest and most comfortable path to the universal economization of spiritual life . . .” (84; 83); for the prevailing concept of culture surely includes recognition of the autonomous value of the aesthetic—assuming that this concept is not altogether constituted precisely by that recognition. This observation leads at least to the demand that the prevailing concept of culture be replaced by another concept of culture. And that replacement will have to be based on the insight into what is specific to the political.

[9] Schmitt expressly forgoes, as we have seen, an “exhaustive definition” of the political. Proceeding on the assumption that the “various, relatively independent domains of human thought and action” (the moral, the aesthetic, the economic, etc.) have “their own criteria” by which they are constituted in their relative independence, he asks about the “criterion of the political.” The criteria in question have the character of “ultimate distinctions,” or, more accurately, of ultimate “oppositions.” Thus the criterion of the moral is the opposition of good and evil, the criterion of the aesthetic, the opposition of beautiful and ugly, etc. In taking his bearings by this general relationship, Schmitt defines “the distinction between friend and enemy” as “the specifically political distinction” (26*f.*; 26 *f.*). Here “enemy”—and thus also “friend”—is always to be understood only as the *public* enemy (friend), “a *totality* of men that fights at least potentially, that is, has a real possibility of fighting, and stands in opposition to a corresponding totality” (28; 29). Of the two elements of the friend-enemy mode of viewing things, the “enemy” element manifestly takes precedence, as is already shown by the fact that when Schmitt explains this viewpoint in detail, he actually speaks only of the meaning of “enemy” (cf. 26; 27, 28; 29, and 32*f.*; 32 *f.*). One may say: every “totality of men” looks around for friends only—it *has* friends only—because it already has enemies; “the essence of political relationships [is] contained in reference to a concrete

opposition" (30; 30). "Enemy" therefore takes precedence over "friend," because "the potential for a fight that exists in the region of the real" belongs "to the concept of the enemy"—and not already to the concept of the friend as such (33; 33), and "man's life" gains "its specifically *political* tension" from the potential for war, from the "dire emergency," from the "most extreme possibility" (35; 35). But the possibility of war does not merely constitute the political as such; war is not merely "the most extreme political measure"; war is the dire emergency not merely within an "autonomous" region—the region of the political—but for man simply, because war has and retains a "relationship to the real possibility of *physical killing*" (33; 33); this orientation, which is constitutive for the political, shows that the political is *fundamental* and not a "relatively independent domain" alongside others. The political is the "authoritative" (39; 39). It is in this sense that we are to understand the remark that the political is "not equivalent and analogous" to the moral, the aesthetic, the economic, etc. (26; 26).

[10] This definition of the political has the closest connection to Schmitt's suggested critique of the prevailing concept of culture. This critique questions the "autonomy" of the various "domains of human thought and action." Following the prevailing concept of culture, however, not only are the individual "provinces of culture" "autonomous" in relation to one another, but, prior to them, culture as a whole is already "autonomous," the sovereign creation, the "pure product" of the human spirit. This viewpoint makes us forget that "culture" always presupposes something that is cultivated: culture is always the *culture of nature*. This expression means, primarily, that culture develops the natural predisposition; it is careful nurture of nature—whether of the soil or of the human spirit makes no difference; it thus *obeys* the orders that nature itself gives. But the statement can also mean *conquering* nature through obedience to nature (*parendo vincere*, in Bacon's phrase); then culture is not so much faithful nurture of nature as a harsh and cunning fight *against* nature. Whether culture is understood as nurture of nature or as a fight with nature depends on how nature is understood: as exemplary

order or as disorder to be eliminated. But however culture is understood, "culture" is certainly the culture of nature. "Culture" is to such an extent the culture of nature that culture can be understood as a sovereign creation of the spirit only if the nature being cultivated has been presupposed to be the *opposite* of spirit, and been *forgotten*. Because we now understand by "culture" primarily the culture of *human* nature, the presupposition of culture is primarily human nature; and because man is by his nature an *animal sociale*, the human nature on which culture is based is the natural social relations of men, that is, the way in which man, prior to all culture, behaves toward other men. The term for natural social relations understood in this manner is *status naturalis*. One can therefore say: the foundation of culture is the *status naturalis*.

[11] *Hobbes* understood the *status civilis* in the sense of the specifically modern concept of culture—here let it remain an open question whether, strictly speaking, there is any concept of culture other than the *modern* one—as the *opposite* of the *status naturalis*; the *status civilis* is the presupposition of every culture in the narrow sense (i.e. every nurture of the arts and sciences) and is itself already based on a particular culture, namely, on a disciplining of the human will. We will here disregard *Hobbes's* view of the relationship between *status naturalis* and culture (in the broadest sense) as an opposition; here we only emphasize the fact that *Hobbes* describes the *status naturalis* as the *status belli*, simply, although it must be borne in mind that "the nature of war, consisteth *not in actual fighting*; but in the known *disposition* thereto" (*Leviathan* XIII). In *Schmitt's* terminology this statement means that the *status naturalis* is the genuinely *political* status; for, also according to *Schmitt*, "the political" is found "*not in fighting itself* . . . but in a behavior that is determined by this real *possibility*" (37; 37). It follows that the political that *Schmitt* brings to bear as fundamental is the "state of nature" that underlies every culture; *Schmitt* restores the *Hobbesian* concept of the state of nature to a place of honor (see 58; 59). Therewith the question about the genus within which the specific difference of the political is to be

stipulated has also been answered: the political is a *status* of man; indeed, the political is *the* status as the “natural,” the fundamental and extreme, status of man.

[12] To be sure, the state of nature is defined by Schmitt in a fundamentally different fashion than it is by Hobbes. For Hobbes, it is the state of war of individuals; for Schmitt, it is the state of war of groups (especially of nations). For Hobbes, in the state of nature everyone is the enemy of everyone else; for Schmitt, all political behavior is oriented toward *friend* and enemy. This difference has its basis in the *polemical* intention of Hobbes’s definition of the state of nature: for the fact that the state of nature is the state of war of all against all is supposed to motivate the abandonment of the state of nature. To this negation of the state of nature or of the political, Schmitt opposes the position of the political.

[13] Granted, in Hobbes there is no question of a total negation of the political; according to his doctrine, the state of nature continues at least in the relationship between the nations. And thus Hobbes’s polemic against the state of nature as the state of war of *individuals*—which Schmitt implicitly adopts, as shown by his comment, expressly following Hobbes, on the relationship between protection and obedience (52; 53; cf. also 46f.; 46 f.)—does not need to question the political in Schmitt’s sense, that is, the “natural” character of the relationships of human *groups*. Nevertheless, according to Schmitt it belongs to the essence of the political group that it can “demand . . . from the members of its own nation *the readiness to die*” (46; 46); and the justification of this claim is at least qualified by Hobbes: in battle he who deserts the ranks out of fear for his life acts “only” dishonorably, but not unjustly (*Lev. XXI*). The state can justifiably demand from the individual only *conditional* obedience, namely an obedience that does not stand in contradiction to the salvation or preservation of the life of this individual; for the securing of life is the ultimate basis of the state. Therefore, while man is otherwise obliged to unconditional obedience, he is under no obligation to risk his life; for death is the greatest evil. Hobbes does not shrink from the conse-

quence and expressly denies the status of courage as a virtue (*De homine* XIII 9). The same attitude is disclosed in his definition of the *salus populi*: the *salus populi* consists (1) in defense against the enemy from without; (2) in preservation of peace within; (3) in just and modest enrichment of the individual, which is much more readily attained through work and frugality than through victorious wars, and is particularly promoted by the nurture of mechanics and mathematics; (4) in the enjoyment of innocuous freedom (*De cive* XIII 6 and 14). As soon as “humanity” becomes the subject or object of planning, these principles have to lead to the ideal of civilization, that is, to the demand for rational social relations of humanity as *one* “partnership in consumption and production” (58). Hobbes, to a much higher degree than Bacon, for example, is the author of the ideal of civilization. By this very fact he is the founder of liberalism. The right to the securing of life pure and simple—and this right sums up Hobbes’s natural right—has fully the character of an inalienable human right, that is, of an individual’s *claim* that takes precedence over the state and determines its purpose and its limits; Hobbes’s foundation for the natural-right claim to the securing of life pure and simple sets the path to the whole system of human rights in the sense of liberalism, if his foundation does not actually make such a course necessary. Hobbes differs from developed liberalism only, but certainly, by his knowing and seeing *against what* the liberal ideal of civilization has to be persistently fought for: not merely against rotten institutions, against the evil will of a ruling class, but against the natural evil of man; in an unliberal world Hobbes forges ahead to lay the foundation of liberalism against the—*sit venia verbo*—unliberal nature of man, whereas later men, ignorant of their premises and goals, trust in the original goodness (based on god’s creation and providence) of human nature or, on the basis of natural-scientific neutrality, nurse hopes for an improvement of nature, hopes unjustified by man’s experience of himself. Hobbes, *in view of* the state of nature, attempts to overcome the state of nature within the limits in which it allows of being overcome, whereas later men either dream up a state of nature or, on the ba-

sis of a supposed deeper insight into history and therewith into the essence of man, forget the state of nature. But—in all fairness to later men—ultimately that dreaming and that oblivion are merely the consequence of the negation of the state of nature, merely the consequence of the position of civilization introduced by Hobbes.

[14] If it is true that the final self-awareness of liberalism is the philosophy of culture, we may say in summary that liberalism, sheltered by and engrossed in a world of culture, forgets the foundation of culture, the state of nature, that is, human nature in its dangerousness and endangeredness. Schmitt returns, contrary to liberalism, to its author, Hobbes, in order to strike at the root of liberalism in Hobbes's express negation of the state of nature.² Whereas Hobbes in an unliberal world accomplishes the founding of liberalism, Schmitt in a liberal world undertakes the critique of liberalism.

III

[15] Schmitt confronts the liberal negation of the political with the position of the political, that is, with the recognition of the reality of the political. For the position of the political it is immaterial, in Schmitt's express opinion, whether one regards the political as desirable or detestable: the intent of the position "is neither bellicose or militarist, nor imperialist, nor pacifist" (33; 33). Schmitt desires only to know *what is*. This statement does not mean that he considers his expositions "value-free," that he wants (whether out of concern for the scientific character of his study or for the freedom of personal decision) to leave open all possibilities for taking an evaluative stance toward the political. Rather, he intends precisely to seal off all such possibilities: the political *cannot*

²In the first edition of this treatise Schmitt had described Hobbes as "by far the greatest and perhaps the sole truly systematic political thinker" (*Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vol. 58, p. 25). Schmitt now speaks of Hobbes only as "a great and truly systematic political thinker" (64). In truth Hobbes is *the* antipolitical thinker ("political" understood in Schmitt's sense).

be evaluated at all, cannot be measured by an ideal; applied to the political, *all* ideals are nothing but “abstractions,” *all* “normative prescriptions” nothing but “fictions” (48f.; 49 f. and 27f.; 28 f.). For the political is constituted by reference “to the real possibility of physical killing” of men by men (33; 33); and “there is no rational purpose, no norm however correct, no program however exemplary, no social ideal however beautiful, no legitimacy or legality that can justify men’s killing one another for its own sake” (49f.; 49 f.).

[16] The position of the political results in the *unpolemical* description of the political. As such, the position opposes Hobbes’s polemical description of the state of nature. Hobbes had presented the state of nature as in itself impossible: the state of nature is the state of war of all against all; in the state of nature, everyone is the enemy of everyone else. According to Schmitt, the subjects of the state of nature are not individuals but totalities; furthermore, not every totality is the enemy of every other totality, but alongside the possibility of enmity the possibilities of alliance and neutrality also exist (35; 35). The state of nature so understood is in itself *possible*. That it is *real*, however, is proved by the whole history of humanity up to the present day. It may be that there will someday be a completely depoliticized state of humanity—“whether and when this state of the earth and of humanity will occur, I do not know”; at any rate that state “for the time being does not exist,” and therefore it would be “a dishonest fiction to assume that it is at hand” (53–54; 54).

[17] Now one cannot—least of all can Schmitt himself—take relief in the fact that the depoliticized state “*for the time being* does not exist” (54; 54), that “war as a real possibility is *still* present *today*” (36; 37). In view of the fact that there is today a powerful movement striving for the total elimination of the real possibility of war and hence the abolition of the political, in view of the fact that this movement not only exercises a great influence upon the mentality of the age but also authoritatively determines the real circumstances—this movement led, after all, to war’s being “*today* . . . probably neither something pious, nor something morally good, nor something profitable” (36; 36), whereas in ear-

lier centuries war could indeed be all these things—in view of this fact one must look beyond today and ask: granted that “war as a real possibility is still present today,” will war still be a possibility present tomorrow? or the day after tomorrow? In other words: though the abolition of the political may in no way have succeeded *so far*, is not this abolition nevertheless possible in the future? is it not possible at all?

[18] Schmitt gives the following answer to this question: the political is a basic characteristic of human life; politics in this sense *is* destiny; therefore man cannot escape politics (35f.; 36 f., 65f.; 66 f., 76ff.; 76 ff.). The inescapability of the political is displayed in the contradiction in which man necessarily becomes entangled if he attempts to eliminate the political. This effort has a prospect of success if and only if it becomes political; that is, if it “is strong enough to group men into friends and enemies,” if it thus “would be able to drive the pacifists into *war* against the non-pacifists, into a ‘war against war.’” The war against war will then be undertaken as “the definitively final war of humanity.” Such a war, however, is “necessarily especially intensive and inhuman” because in it the enemy is fought as “an inhuman monster . . . that must be not only fended off but definitively annihilated” (36; 37). But humanity cannot be expected to be especially humane and, therefore, unpolitical after having just put behind it an especially inhumane war. Thus the effort to abolish the political for the sake of humanity has as its necessary consequence nothing other than the increase of inhumanity. When it is said that the political is a basic characteristic of human life, in other words that man ceases to be man if he ceases to be political, this statement also, and precisely, means that man ceases to be human when he ceases to be political. If man thus gets entangled in contradictions when he attempts to eliminate the political, that attempt is ultimately possible only through dishonesty: “To curse war as the murder of men, and then to demand of men that—so that there will ‘never again be war’—they wage war and kill and allow themselves to be killed in war, is a manifest fraud” (48; 49).

[19] The political is thus not only possible but also real;

and not only real but also necessary. It is necessary because it is given in human nature. Therefore the opposition between the negation and the position of the political can be traced back to a quarrel over human nature. The ultimate controversy is whether man is by nature good or evil. Here, however, "good" and "evil" are "not to be taken in a specifically moral or ethical sense"; rather, "good" is to be understood as "undangerous," and "evil" as "dangerous." Thus the ultimate question is "whether man is a dangerous or an undangerous being, a perilous or a harmless, nonperilous being" (58; 59). "All genuine political theories" presuppose man's dangerousness (61; 61). Accordingly, the thesis of man's dangerousness is the ultimate presupposition of the position of the political.

[20] The train of thought just recounted is in all probability not Schmitt's last word, and it is certainly not the most profound thing that he has to say. It conceals a reflection that moves in an entirely different direction, a reflection that cannot be reconciled with the line of thought described above.

[21] Schmitt describes the thesis of the dangerousness of man as the ultimate presupposition of the position of the political: the necessity of the political is as certain as man's dangerousness. But is man's dangerousness unshakably certain? Schmitt himself qualifies the thesis of man's dangerousness as a "*supposition*," as an "anthropological confession of *faith*" (58; 58). But if man's dangerousness is only supposed or believed in, not genuinely known, the opposite, too, can be regarded as possible, and the attempt to eliminate man's dangerousness (which until now has always really existed) can be put into practice. If man's dangerousness is only believed in, it is in principle *threatened*, and therewith the political is threatened also.

[22] Schmitt concedes that the political is in principle threatened when he says: "Whether and when this [completely apolitical] state of the earth and of humanity will occur, *I do not know*" (53–54; 54). Now the political could not be threatened if, as Schmitt asserts in a series of passages, it were simply inescapable. One must therefore add an obvious qualifier to his assertion that

the political is inescapable, and must understand that assertion as follows: the political is inescapable as long as there is just *one* political opposition, even just as a possibility. Schmitt implies this qualifier in the course of the previously adduced argument against pacifism, for that line of argument presupposes that the opposition between pacifists and nonpacifists does not disappear. The inescapability of the political thus exists only conditionally; ultimately, the political remains threatened.

[23] If the political is ultimately threatened, the position of the political must ultimately be *more* than the recognition of the reality of the political, namely, an espousal of the threatened political, an *affirmation* of the political. It is therefore necessary to ask: why does Schmitt affirm the political?

[24] The political is threatened insofar as man's dangerousness is threatened. Therefore the affirmation of the political is the affirmation of man's dangerousness. How should this affirmation be understood? Should it be intended *politically*, it can have "no normative meaning but only an existential meaning" (49; 49), like everything political. One then will have to ask: in time of danger, in the "dire emergency," does "a fighting totality of men" affirm the dangerousness of its enemy? does it *wish for* dangerous enemies? And one will have to answer "no," along the lines of C. Fabricius's comment when he heard that a Greek philosopher had proclaimed pleasure as the greatest good: If only Pyrrhus and the Samnites shared this philosopher's opinion as long as we are at war with them! Likewise, a nation in danger wants its own dangerousness not for the sake of dangerousness, but for the sake of being rescued from danger. Thus, the affirmation of dangerousness as such as no political meaning but only a "normative," *moral* meaning; expressed appropriately, that affirmation is the affirmation of power as the power that forms states, of *virtù* in Machiavelli's sense. Here, too, we recall Hobbes, who describes fearfulness as the virtue (which, incidentally, is just as much negated by him as is the state of nature itself) of the state of nature, but who understands fearfulness as inclusive of glory and courage. Thus warlike morals seem to be the ultimate legitima-

tion for Schmitt's affirmation of the political, and the opposition between the negation and the position of the political seems to coincide with the opposition between pacifist internationalism and bellicose nationalism.

[25] Is that conclusion really correct? One has to doubt it if one considers the resolution with which Schmitt refuses to come on as a belligerent against the pacifists (33). And one must quarrel with the conclusion as soon as one has seen more precisely how Schmitt arrives at man's dangerousness as the ultimate presupposition of the position of the political. After he has already twice rejected the pacifist ideal on the ground that the ideal in any case has no meaning for behavior in the present situation and for the understanding of this situation (36f.; 36 f. and 54f.; 54 f.), Schmitt—while recognizing the possibility in principle of the “world state” as a wholly apolitical “partnership in consumption and production” of humanity united—finally asks “upon which men will the terrible power devolve that a global economic and technical centralization entails”; in other words, which men will *rule* in the “world state.” “This question cannot by any means be dismissed by hoping . . . that government of men over men will have become superfluous, because men will then be absolutely free; for the question immediately arises, *for what* they will be free. One can answer this question with optimistic or pessimistic suppositions,” namely with the optimistic supposition that man will then be undangerous, or with the pessimistic supposition that he will be dangerous (58f.; 58 f.). The question of man's dangerousness or undangerousness thus surfaces in view of the question whether the government of men over men is, or will be, necessary or superfluous. Accordingly, dangerousness means *need of dominion*. And the ultimate quarrel occurs not between bellicosity and pacifism (or nationalism and internationalism) but between the “*authoritarian* and *anarchistic* theories” (60; 60).

[26] The quarrel between the authoritarian and the anarchistic theories concerns whether man is by nature evil or good. But “evil” and “good,” here, are “*not* to be taken in a specifically *moral* or ethical sense” but are to be understood as “dangerous”

and “undangerous.” What is thereby said becomes clear if one takes into account the double meaning of “evil” that Schmitt mentions. “‘Evil’ can appear as corruption, weakness, cowardice, stupidity, *but also* as ‘coarseness,’ instinctual drivenness, vitality, irrationality, etc.” (58; 59). “Evil,” in other words, can be understood either as *human inferiority* or as *animal power*, as *humana impotentia* or as *naturae potentia* (Spinoza, *Eth.* III *praef.*). Now if “evil” is not meant in the moral sense, only the second meaning can be in question here. In this sense “the philosophers of statecraft of the seventeenth century (Hobbes, Spinoza, Pufendorff)” have described man in the state of nature as “evil”: that is, “evil” “like *beasts* that are moved by their drives (hunger, cupidity, fear, jealousy)” (59; 59). But the question arises *why* these philosophers, Hobbes in particular, understood man as “evil like the beasts.” Hobbes had to understand evil as *innocent* “evil” because he denied sin; and he had to deny sin because he did not recognize any primary obligation of man that takes precedence over every claim *qua* justified claim, because he understood man as by nature free, that is, without obligation; for Hobbes, therefore, the fundamental political fact was natural right as the justified *claim* of the individual, and Hobbes conceived of obligation as a *subsequent* restriction upon that claim. If one takes this approach, one cannot demur in principle against the proclamation of human rights as claims of the individuals upon the state and contrary to the state, against the distinction between society and state, against liberalism—assuming that liberalism is not altogether the unavoidable consequence of the Hobbesian approach. And once one understands man’s evil as the innocent “evil” of the beast, but of a beast that can become astute through injury and thus can be educated, the limits one sets for education finally become a matter of mere “*supposition*”—whether very narrow limits, as set by Hobbes himself, who therefore became an adherent of absolute monarchy; or broader limits such as those of liberalism; or whether one imagines education as capable of just about everything, as anarchism does. The opposition between evil and good loses its keen edge, it loses its very meaning, as soon as evil is understood as innocent

“evil” and thereby goodness is understood as an aspect of evil itself. The task therefore arises—for purposes of the radical critique of liberalism that Schmitt strives for—of nullifying the view of human evil as animal and thus innocent evil, and to return to the view of human evil as moral baseness; only in this way can Schmitt remain in harmony with himself if indeed “the core of the political idea” is “the *morally* demanding decision” (*Politische Theologie* 56). The correction that Schmitt undertakes in the view of evil held by Hobbes and his successors not only fails to meet the foregoing requirement but even contradicts it. Whereas in the case of Hobbes the natural and thus innocent “evil” is emphasized so that it can be *combated*, Schmitt speaks with an unmistakable *sympathy* of the “evil” that is not to be understood morally. This sympathy, however, is nothing other than *admiration* of animal power; and the same thing that Schmitt says in an already quoted passage on the aesthetic in general also applies to this admiration. Moreover, the inappropriateness of this sympathy immediately becomes clear when we discover that *what* is admired is not an excellence but a deficiency, a need (namely a need of dominion). Man’s dangerousness, revealed as a need of dominion, can appropriately be understood only as moral baseness. It must be recognized as such, but it cannot be affirmed. But then what is the meaning of the affirmation of the political?

[27] *Why* Schmitt affirms the political, and, first of all, *that* he *affirms* it and does not merely recognize it as real or necessary, is shown most clearly in his polemic against the ideal that corresponds to the negation of the political. Ultimately Schmitt by no means repudiates this ideal as utopian—he says, after all, that he does not know whether it cannot be realized—but he does abhor it. That Schmitt does not display his views in a moralizing fashion but endeavors to conceal them only makes his polemic the more effective. Let us listen to Schmitt himself!: “if . . . the distinction between friend and enemy ceases even as a mere possibility, there will only be a politics-free weltanschauung, culture, civilization, economy, morals, law, art, *entertainment*, etc., but there will be neither politics nor state” (53; 54). We have emphasized

the word "entertainment" because Schmitt does everything to make entertainment *nearly* disappear in a series of man's serious pursuits; above all, the "etc." that immediately follows "entertainment" glosses over the fact that "entertainment" is really the ultimate term in the series, its *finis ultimus*. Schmitt thus makes it clear: The opponents of the political may say what they will; they may appeal on behalf of their plan to the highest concerns of man; their good faith shall not be denied; it is to be granted that weltanschauung, culture, etc., do not *have* to be entertainment, but they *can* become entertainment; on the other hand, it is impossible to mention politics and the state in the same breath as "entertainment"; politics and the state are the only *guarantee* against the world's becoming a world of entertainment; therefore, what the opponents of the political want is ultimately tantamount to the establishment of a world of entertainment, a world of amusement, a world without *seriousness*. "A definitively pacified globe," Schmitt says in an earlier passage, "would be a world without politics. In such a world there could be various, perhaps *very interesting*, oppositions and contrasts, competitions and intrigues of all kinds, but no opposition on the basis of which it could sensibly be demanded of men that they sacrifice their lives" (35f.; 35 f.; emphasis mine). Here, too, what Schmitt concedes to the pacifists' ideal state of affairs, what he *finds striking* about it, is its capacity to be interesting and entertaining; here, too, he takes pains to hide the criticism contained in the observation "*perhaps* very interesting." He does not, of course, wish to call into doubt whether the world without politics is interesting; if he is convinced of anything, it is that the apolitical world is *very* interesting ("competitions and intrigues of all sorts"); the "perhaps" only questions, but certainly *does* question, whether this capacity to be interesting can claim the interest of a human being worthy of the name; the "perhaps" conceals and betrays Schmitt's *nausea* over this capacity to be interesting, which is only possible if man has forgotten what genuinely matters. It thus becomes clear why Schmitt rejects the ideal of pacifism (more fundamentally: of civilization), why he af-

firms the political: he affirms the political because he sees in the threatened status of the political a threat to the seriousness of human life. The affirmation of the political is ultimately nothing other than the affirmation of the moral.

[28] One reaches the same result if one looks more closely at Schmitt's description of the modern age as the age of depoliticization. With this description he certainly does *not* mean that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries politics is to a less extent destiny than in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; today, no less than in earlier times, humanity is divided into "totalities that have a real possibility of fighting one another." A fundamental transformation has occurred, not in *the fact* that men quarrel but in *what* they quarrel *about*. What men quarrel about depends on what is considered important, authoritative. Different things are regarded as authoritative in different centuries: in the sixteenth century, theology was authoritative; in the seventeenth, metaphysics; in the eighteenth, morals; in the nineteenth, the economy; and in the twentieth, technology. Basically: in every century a different "domain" is the "central domain" (81–85; 80–84). The political, because it has "no . . . domain of its own" (26; 27), is never the "central domain." Whereas the "central domains" change, the political constantly remains destiny. But as *human* destiny the political is dependent upon what ultimately matters for man: "the state, too, [gets] its reality and power from the respective central domain, because the authoritative issues that groups, divided into friends and enemies, quarrel about are likewise determined by the authoritative domain" (87; 86). The exact meaning of the depoliticization that is characteristic of the modern age can thus be discerned only if one understands which law rules in the "succession of changing central domains." This law is the "tendency toward neutralization," that is, the striving to gain a ground that "makes possible security, clarity, agreement, and peace" (89; 89). Agreement and peace here mean agreement and peace at all costs. In principle, however, it is always possible to reach agreement regarding the means to an end that is already fixed, whereas there

is always quarreling over the ends themselves: we are always quarreling with each other and with ourselves only over the just and the good (Plato, *Euthyphro* 7B-D and *Phaedrus* 263A). Therefore, if one seeks agreement at all costs, there is no other path than to abandon entirely the question of what is right and to concern oneself solely with the means. It thus becomes intelligible that modern Europe, once it had started out—in order to avoid the quarrel over the right faith—in search of a neutral ground *as such*, finally arrived at faith in technology. “The self-evidence of today’s widespread faith in technology is based only on the fact that people were able to believe that in technology they had found the absolutely and definitively neutral ground . . . In comparison to theological, metaphysical, moral, and even economic questions, which one can quarrel about forever, purely technical problems entail something refreshingly objective; they allow of solutions that are clear” (90–91; 90). But the neutrality of technology is only apparent: “Technology always remains as an instrument and a weapon, and precisely because technology serves everyone, it is not neutral” (90–91; 90). The speciousness of this neutrality reveals the absurdity of the attempt to find an “absolutely and definitively neutral ground,” to reach agreement at all costs. Agreement at all costs is possible only as agreement at the cost of the meaning of human life; for agreement at all costs is possible only if man has relinquished asking the question of what is right; and if man relinquishes that question, he relinquishes being a man. But if he seriously asks the question of what is right, the quarrel will be ignited (in view of “the inextricable set of problems” (91; 90) this question entails), the life-and-death quarrel: the political—the grouping of humanity into friends and enemies—owes its legitimation to the seriousness of the question of what is right.

[29] The affirmation of the political is the affirmation of the state of nature. Schmitt opposes the affirmation of the state of nature to the Hobbesian negation of the state of nature. The state of nature is the *status belli*, pure and simple. Thus it appears that the affirmation of the state of nature can only be bellicose. That appearance fades away as soon as one has grasped what the return

to the state of nature means for Schmitt. The affirmation of the state of nature does not mean the affirmation of war but “relinquishment of the security of the status quo” (94; 93). Security is relinquished not because war would be something “ideal,” but because it is necessary to return from “splendid vicarage,” from the “comfort and ease of the existing status quo” to the “cultural or social nothing,” to the “secret, humble beginning,” “to undamaged, non-corrupt nature” (94; 93) so that “out of the power of a pure and whole knowledge ... the order of the human things” can arise again (96; 95).

[30] If, then, according to Schmitt’s actual opinion, the position of the political can be traced back to the position of the moral, how does that position square with the polemic, which pervades his whole text, against the primacy of morals over politics? The first explanation that suggests itself is that by “morals” in that polemic he is referring to altogether specific morals, namely, a morals that stands in fundamental contradiction to the political. For Schmitt, “moral”—at least as used in the context here—always refers to “*humanitarian* morality” (cf. 82ff.; 80 ff.). But that usage means that Schmitt is tying himself to his opponents’ view of morality instead of questioning the claim of humanitarian-pacifist morals to be morals; he remains trapped in the view that he is attacking.

[31] Now the polemic against morals—against “ideals” and “normative prescriptions”—does not prevent Schmitt from passing a *moral* judgment on humanitarian morals, on the ideal of pacifism. Of course, he takes pains, as we have shown, to conceal this judgment. An *aporia* finds expression in this concealment: the threatened status of the political makes necessary an evaluative statement on the political; yet at the same time insight into the essence of the political arouses doubt about all evaluative statements on the political. For such a statement would be a “free, unmonitorable decision that concerns no one other than the person who freely makes the decision”; it would essentially be a “private matter” (48; 49); but the political is removed from all arbitrary, private discretion; it has the character of transprivate *obligation*. If

it is now presupposed that all ideals are private and thus nonobligatory, obligation cannot be conceived as such, as duty, but can be conceived only as inescapable necessity. It is this presupposition, then, that disposes Schmitt to assert the inescapability of the political, and—as soon as his subject matter forces him to stop maintaining this assertion—to conceal his moral judgment; and this presupposition is, as he himself emphasizes, the characteristic presupposition of the “individualistic-liberal society” (48; 49).

[32] Let us now make thoroughly clear what the affirmation of the political in disregard of the moral, the primacy of the political over the moral, would signify. Being political means being oriented to the “dire emergency.” Therefore the affirmation of the political as such is the affirmation of fighting as such, wholly irrespective of *what* is being fought *for*. In other words: he who affirms the political as such comports himself *neutrally* toward all groupings into friends and enemies. However much this neutrality may differ from the neutrality of the man who denies the political as such, he who affirms the political as such and thereby behaves neutrally toward all groupings into friends and enemies does not want “to place” himself “outside the political totality . . . and live only as a private man” (51; 52); he does not have the *will* to neutralization, to the avoidance of decision at all costs, but in fact is eager for decision; as eagerness for *any* decision *regardless of content*, this neutrality makes use of the possibility—which originally was made accessible for the sake of neutralization—of something that is beyond all decision. He who affirms the political as such respects all who want to fight; he is just as *tolerant* as the liberals—but with the opposite intention: whereas the liberal respects and tolerates all “*honest*” convictions so long as they merely acknowledge the legal order, *peace*, as sacrosanct, he who affirms the political as such respects and tolerates all “*serious*” convictions, that is, all decisions oriented to the real possibility of *war*. Thus the affirmation of the political as such proves to be a liberalism with the opposite polarity. And therewith Schmitt’s statement that “the astonishingly consistent . . . systematics of liberal

thought" has "still not been replaced in Europe today by any other system" (71; 70) proves to be true.

[33] The affirmation of the political as such can therefore be only Schmitt's first word against liberalism; that affirmation can only *prepare for* the radical critique of liberalism. In an earlier text Schmitt says of Donoso Cortés: he "despises the liberals, whereas he respects atheistic-anarchistic socialism as his mortal enemy . . ." (*Politische Theologie* 55). The battle occurs only between mortal enemies: with total disdain—hurling crude insults or maintaining the rules of politeness, depending on temperament—they shove aside the "neutral" who seeks to mediate, to maneuver, between them. "Disdain" is to be taken literally; they do not deign to notice the neutral; each looks intently at his enemy; in order to gain a free line of fire, with a sweep of the hand they wave aside—without looking at—the neutral who lingers in the middle, interrupting the view of the enemy. The polemic against liberalism can therefore only signify a concomitant or preparatory action: it is meant to clear the field for the battle of decision between the "spirit of technicity," the "mass faith that inspires an antireligious, this-worldly activism" (94; 93), and the opposite spirit and faith, which, as it seems, still has no name. Ultimately, two completely opposed answers to the question of what is right confront each other, and these answers allow of no mediation and no neutrality (cf. the remark about "two-membered antitheses" and "three-membered diagrams" or "constructions" on p. 73; p. 73). Thus what *ultimately* matters to Schmitt is not the battle against liberalism. For that very reason the affirmation of the political as such is not his last word. His last word is "the order of the human things" (96; 95).

[34] It is nonetheless true that the polemic against liberalism very often seems to be Schmitt's last word, that he very often gets entangled in the polemic against liberalism, and that he thus gets diverted from his real intention and is detained on the level staked out by liberalism. This entanglement is no accidental failure but the necessary result of the principle that "all concepts of

the spiritual sphere . . . are to be understood only in terms of concrete political existence" (85; 84), and that "all political concepts, ideas, and words" have "a *polemical* meaning" (30; 31). *In concreto* Schmitt violates this principle, which itself is entirely bound to liberal presuppositions, by opposing his unpolemical concept of the state of nature to Hobbes's polemical concept of the state of nature; and he fundamentally rejects this principle by expecting to gain the order of human things from a "*pure and whole* knowledge" (96; 95). For a pure and whole knowledge is never, unless by accident, polemical; and a pure and whole knowledge cannot be gained "from concrete political existence," from the situation of the age, but only by means of a return to the origin, to "undamaged, noncorrupt nature" (94; 93).

[35] We said [par. 14 above] that Schmitt undertakes the critique of liberalism in a liberal world; and we meant thereby that his critique of liberalism occurs in the horizon of liberalism; his unliberal tendency is restrained by the still unvanquished "systematics of liberal thought." The critique introduced by Schmitt against liberalism can therefore be completed only if one succeeds in gaining a horizon beyond liberalism. In such a horizon Hobbes completed the foundation of liberalism. A radical critique of liberalism is thus possible only on the basis of an adequate understanding of Hobbes. To show what can be learned from Schmitt in order to achieve that urgent task was therefore the principal intention of our notes.